

Invitation To A Royal Wedding

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Summary: An inept baker, an idiotic florist, and a bachelor party that is spicy in more ways than one...

Invitation To A Royal Wedding

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Standard Disclaimer/Credit Where Credit Is Due: The characters belong to George Lucas. The story is MINE, and if he tries to use it without my permission, I'll sue HIM! Ha! Just kidding. The Mac OS belongs to Apple Computer.

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The Big Day

"They're going to start soon, Your Majesty," one of Padm's handmaidens told her. The Queen nodded. They stood in a small room that opened onto the Palace courtyard. The enormous courtyard easily held the hundreds of assembled dignitaries, politicians, friends, and family members who had been invited to witness the joining of Anakin and Padm in holy matrimony. Padm peeked out a window and nervously straightened the folds of her elaborate gown. "Look at all those people," she said apprehensively. At the other end of the courtyard, she could see Anakin and Obi-Wan, dressed in their Jedi robes and shifting nervously from foot to foot. She smiled. At least she was not the only one who was nervous. She hoped that she wouldn't trip and fall flat on her face when she walked down that center aisle, which reminded her

"Where's Chancellor Palpatine?" she asked abruptly.

"Here, Your Majesty," he said calmly as he entered the small room. He looked her up and down, smiling. "Well, don't you look lovely?"

"Thank you," she replied, relieved to see him.

"You know, I could quite fancy you myself," he joked. She giggled. From outside, they heard music begin, and her stomach fluttered nervously. "Not too long now," he murmured. He grasped her veil to position it, impulsively bending to kiss her cheek before pulling the fine gold mesh down over her face. She took his arm and together they stood waiting for their musical cue to begin what seemed like a mile-long walk down the isle. SabÃ© hurried into the room, caught a glimpse of the Chancellor's face, and groaned.

"Palpatine!" she wailed in dismay. "Look what you've done!" She grabbed a mirror from the Queen's make-up kit and held it up so he could see his reflection. "Again," she said quietly, for his ears only.

"Oh dear," he murmured. SabÃ© reached up and used her fingers to wipe the white make-up from his lips. He gave her a funny little smile. She shook her head in exasperation and hurried over to PadmÃ©, lifting her veil to inspect the damage. Luckily, a quick touch-up was all that was needed. Some of the other handmaidens were whispering quietly and giggling behind their hands. SabÃ©'s eyes swept over them with a disapproving gaze. As she worked to repair PadmÃ©'s make-up, she spoke.

"One day," she said acidly, "I will marry and leave the Queen's service, and it will be left to one of you to spend four hours preparing Her Majesty's hair and make-up, only to have some unthinking man ruin it with a kiss. Then we will see how funny YOU think it." PadmÃ© ducked her head so that SabÃ© would not see her smile and give her a scolding as well. She suddenly noticed that SabÃ© was wearing a flowing scarf tied around her neck. She grasped the end and held it up.

"What's this, SabÃ©?" she asked curiously.

"Nothing," SabÃ© said irritably, snatching the end of the scarf out of the Queen's hand and hurrying away.

"Touchy, isn't she?" PadmÃ© said to Palpatine. The Chancellor was deeply engrossed in the study of his feet.

Outside, the music was coming to an end. The assembled guests began murmuring in anticipation. SabÃ© and the other handmaidens quickly positioned themselves around PadmÃ© and Palpatine. The wedding march music began, and SabÃ© opened the door. The guests rose from their gilded chairs as the bridal party, led by SabÃ©, began their slow, stately walk down the isle.

One week earlier:

"Flowers?" SabÃ© asked, reading from her list. PadmÃ© sighed.

"I spoke to the florist this morning, and he has promised me, hand on heart, that he will be able to get green roses from Dantooine by next week."

"What about the baker?" Palpatine asked. They were meeting in the living room of the small home he maintained on Naboo. As both of her parents were deceased, Padm  had asked him to walk her down the aisle. Somehow that had evolved into his standing in for her parents in the rest of the wedding plans, which was just fine with Padm . Any wedding can quickly evolve into a nightmare of logistics; a royal wedding is almost guaranteed to do so. Padm  often felt like she was trapped on a runaway pod racer, unable to do anything but watch as the wedding plans rocketed out of control.

"The baker," Sab  said, sighing. "The baker delivered a lovely cake last week. It was chocolate."

"Did it say 'Happy Birthday' on it?" Palpatine asked.

"No," Sab  said slowly. "That was the previous cake."

"Someone remind me again why we're using this baker," Padm  said. Sab  shrugged.

"His cakes are the best on Naboo," she replied. "The trick is getting him to deliver what you actually ordered."

"At least the dress is done," Padm  said. "You do NOT know what hell that was. I spent HOURS standing motionless as the seamstresses pinned and sewed and basted and cut and tucked  I thought I would go mad from boredom." The voicephone rang.

"It's going to be some dress," Sab  added.

"It had better be," Palpatine said. "It's taken them seven months to put the damn thing together." A servant appeared, carrying the voicephone. He bowed to Padm .

"It's for you, Your Majesty. The Palace."

"Thank you," she said, taking it. "Hello? Yes, this is Padm  . WHAT? You can't be serious. Was anyone hurt? Just the dress. Naturally. All right, thank you." She returned the phone to the servant, who bowed and left.

"Well?" Sab  asked. Padm  put her head in her hands.

"The dress shop burned down this morning. They managed to save everything BUT my dress. It was ruined by smoke damage."

"Unbelievable." Sab  said, shaking her head.

"This is it. This is the last straw. I am going to elope to Tatooine. I'm going to go to a drive through wedding chapel and get married by a big fat Jabba the Hutt impersonator." Sab  gave her a look.

"Seriously, what are we going to do?" Padm  shook her head.

"That dress took seven months to make," she said, as though reminding herself. "Seven months." Palpatine sighed.

"Come with me," he said.

"Oh, it's beautiful!" Padm   breathed. They were in the attic of the small house, standing in front of one of several wardrobe trunks that stood against one wall. Inside the open trunk was a long dress of dark emerald green brocade embroidered with small flowers done in golden thread. It had a high neck and the classic Nubian puffed sleeves ending in tapered wrists. The headpiece was a twisted ring of matching emerald brocade, with a veil of fine golden mesh. Pinned to the skirt of the dress were gloves of matching golden mesh. The gloves' wrists were bracelets set with small emeralds. In the bottom of the trunk was a pair of emerald granny boots with gold buttons on the sides. "Where did it come from?"

> "It's been up here for nearly twenty years now," Palpatine said softly. He reached out to touch its sleeve.
 "But where did you get it?" Sab   pressed.

> "It belonged to my wife, Sab  ." Her eyes widened. "This was her wedding dress."
 "Your wife? You have a wife? Where is she?" Sab   looked around as though the previously unknown woman might materialize right there in the attic.

> "She died," he said shortly.
 "I really appreciate this, Chancellor, but as much as I'd love to, I can't wear this dress." Padm   said. "What if something happened to it?"

"Take it," he said. "It's not doing anyone any good up here." Padm  's eyes filled with tears. She went to Palpatine and embraced him.

"Thank you. This means   so much to me." He gave her a sad smile.

"I hope you will find as much happiness in your marriage as I did in mine," he said softly. Padm   looked over at Sab  . Her head was bent and she seemed utterly absorbed in examining the attic floor.

Two days and counting  

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Padm   stood on the tarmac, garbed, made up, and crowned as the Queen of the Naboo. Next to her stood Palpatine, dressed formally in long, flowing robes. Surrounding them were Padm  's retinue of handmaidens and a regiment of Captain Panaka's guards. They all watched the sky, looking for signs indicating that the Jedi transport they awaited had entered the Nubian atmosphere.

"Look," Sab   said, pointing skyward. "Here comes the transport." The spaceship arced through the clear blue sky and landed gently on the tarmac before them. As the hatch opened, Padm   and Palpatine moved forward to greet the passengers.

"It is our pleasure to welcome you back to Naboo, Master Yoda," Padm   said, speaking with the strangulated accent of the well-born Nubian. "We are honored that you will be among our guests at our wedding."

"Greet you I do, Your Majesty," Yoda said, stumping forward. "Chancellor, you too I greet." Palpatine gave him a slight bow. Behind Yoda, Padm   saw Obi-Wan and Anakin, and her face broke into a smile.

"Sir Knight," she said as Obi-Wan approached her, Anakin trailing behind as befitting his status as junior knight. Obi-Wan bowed. "We are greatly pleased to have you back in our presence."

"Your Majesty," Obi-Wan said, gallantly bending to kiss her extended hand. He turned to Palpatine and bowed. "Chancellor."

"Sir Kenobi," he replied, returning his bow. "It is good to see you again." Anakin approached the Queen with a huge grin on his face.

"Your Majesty," he said formally, taking her hand to kiss it. He didn't stop with her hand, but continued up her arm with a trail of kisses leading right to her lips. She giggled. The proper, formal tone of the arrival was broken. "Sorry," he said a bit sheepishly. "I've never been one for formality." The Queen only laughed happily as he swung her in his arms.

Next down the ramp were Shmi Skywalker and her former owner, Watto. Although Watto had grumbled at losing Anakin in the pod races, he had been mollified when a couple of Jedi Knights showed up at his junkshop one day and told him to name his price for Shmi's freedom. He had, and now he lived quite comfortably, having sold his junkshop and opened a droid dealership specializing in top-of-the line models. Shmi managed the dealership for him, looking after his interests with a ferocity that elicited surprised admiration from the Toydarian. Anakin had been quite shocked when Watto had used part of the profits from his sale of Shmi to buy her a decent home, and he continued to look after her with what seemed like real affection (though of course he would never admit to such a thing). There was nothing romantic between them, of course, but theirs was a good partnership.

Shmi approached Padm   shyly. Although the two had been together on many occasions, never before had Shmi seen her acting as the Queen. Shmi began to drop a curtsy, but Padm   stopped her, drawing her into an embrace.

"Soon we will be family," she said quietly. "I look forward to calling you Mother."

As Padm   and Anakin enjoyed a leisurely stroll through the Palace gardens, she took the opportunity to catch him up on the events of the previous weeks.

"So," she concluded, "I shall have a wedding dress to wear after all. And the cake will NOT be chocolate, even though the baker insists that is what I ordered. I told him I didn't care what he thought I'd ordered, he would just have to change it. There were times this week when I wished I had your ability to use the Jedi Mind Trick." Anakin laughed. "At Palpatine's suggestion, I have given over the supervision of the final details to him and Sab  . All that remains to do now is wait." Anakin took her in his arms.

"Waiting could be fun," he said, and bent to kiss her. After a few minutes, his kisses grew more insistent and his hands grew bolder.

"Not here," she murmured, gently pushing him away.

"You're no fun," he told her.

"Of course I'm no fun. I am the Queen," she reminded him, only half-jokingly. "I must go about with a serious expression on my face at all times, and never give in to vulgar public displays of emotion or affection. It is little wonder that most days, I would much prefer to be PadmÃ©."

"And it is little wonder that I prefer PadmÃ© to Queen Amidala. Speaking of which, where is our fair Queen now?"

"Tied up in meetings all day, I'm afraid. The baker, the caterers, the florist, the musicians - I've very wickedly stuck her with all of them. Poor Queen Amidala," she said, grinning.

"Poor Queen Amidala indeed," Anakin agreed, kissing her again. "And while she's stuck with those meetings, her faithful handmaiden is out in the garden making out with her fiancÃ©."

"That shameless hussy!" she exclaimed, kissing him.

"And he is a cad," Anakin remarked.

"Ah, we should go inside and see how it goes with SabÃ©, I suppose," PadmÃ© said. Anakin sighed.

"Yes, Your Majesty," he said teasingly. Together they walked back into the Palace. As they approached the throne room, they heard voices raised in argument. Exchanging a look, they hurried up the hall to see what was happening. SabÃ© sat on the throne, looking cold, imperious, and regally fed up. Before her stood a man in white who was nervously twisting a baker's hat in his hands. Palpatine was there too, stalking the room like an angry cat and haranguing the baker in rather loud Nubian. The baker grew more and more nervous as Palpatine's voice grew more and more irate. When SabÃ© spoke up in the icy tones of the Queen, the color drained from the miserable baker's face. Anakin, who spoke not a word of Nubian, wondered what the problem was. He saw the baker cringe as Palpatine's voice reached a crescendo of displeasure and he gestured, pointing at â€œ"

Anakin followed the direction of Palpatine's pointing finger, and his face broke into a giant grin. On a hovertable sat a huge, elaborate wedding cake under a preservative stasis field. It was a pink wedding cake. A pink wedding that exuded a distinctly fishy aroma. A pink wedding cake frosted with fish-flavored icing (the gods alone knew what flavor the cake itself may be â€œ" Anakin shuddered to think of it) and topped with a cake topper portraying a smiling bride and groom. A smiling Mon Calamari bride and groom. "Oh dear," PadmÃ© murmured. Palpatine broke off in mid-rant and stared at the new arrivals for a moment, then courteously switched to Standard for Anakin's sake, speaking with the same clipped, strangulated Nubian accent that Anakin had only ever heard from the Queen.

"Now," he continued, "I suggest you remove this monstrosity from Her Majesty's throne room before every cat in Theed appears at the Palace gates wanting dinner! Honestly, is a traditional wedding cake frosted with white icing and decorated in the correct manner too much to ask of you?" Subdued, the baker shook his head. "Well, one wouldn't know it from your previous efforts, that much is certain. You've already delivered a birthday cake and a chocolate cake. Now a fish cake. What

will be next, a chicken cake perhaps?"

"Now you see what I've been dealing with for the past few months," Padm   murmured to Anakin.

"What say you in this matter, my husband-to-be?" It took a moment for Anakin to realize that Sab   was addressing HIM.

"Ah  | well  |" he moved towards the throne, followed by Padm  .
"I'll tell you what, honey. I think we should keep the fish cake." He looked over and saw Padm   smile. However, Sab  , who was acting as the Queen, did not find his suggestion amusing.

"What? You cannot be serious!"

"Imagine what an impression it would make," he said, grinning. "Our guests would talk about it for years to come!"

"They certainly would," Palpatine said, sighing. He watched as the baker hastily scurried away, pushing the piscine cake before him. A footman walked in and bowed to Sab  .

"The florist, Your Majesty," he announced.

"Oh gods, not this guy," Padm   murmured. Another footman led the florist into the throne room. The florist was a Gungan. He bounded up to the throne and bowed to Sab  , almost falling over his own feet in the process.

"Meesa get green flowers for yousa wedding, okey day? Flowers bein' here, pretty. Theysa be bombad."

"Indeed," Palpatine said, sighing.

"Are the flowers actually here?" Sab   asked. The Gungan's cheerful face fell.

"Wellsa, meesa gotta leetle problem. Meesa no got enough paint."

"Paint?" Padm   asked suddenly. She had an idea that she knew what was coming.

"Paint!" the gungan nodded enthusiastically. "Meesa getta paint, paint yousa flowers all pretty green!" Padm  's mouth fell open. Sab   groaned. Palpatine closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose. Anakin's brow furrowed.

"Wait a minute," he said. "Are you telling me that you're going to PAINT the flowers?" The Gungan smiled brightly.

"Of course!" the Gungan said. "Flowers nosa green!"

"You can't coat flowers with paint!" Padm   told him. "They'll die!" The Gungan frowned.

"How else yousa get pretty green flowers?"

"You import them from Dantooine," Palpatine said slowly. "That is where they grow green roses." The Gungan's eyes opened wide.

"They growsa there?"

"Yes," SabÃ© said with incredible patience. "We discussed this LAST WEEK, remember?" The Gungan thought about it for about three seconds.

"Ohhh! Meesa remember! Dantooine! Bombad green flowers! Meesa call them now, okey day?"

"The wedding is in two days," PadmÃ© said quietly. "You should have called them weeks ago." The Gungan held up an aerosol can.

"Mesa was busy, painting bombad green flowers!" He waved the can around, somehow managing to hit the button, discharging an enormous spray of bright green paint all over SabÃ©.

"You idiot!" she yelled, coughing. Green paint covered her face, her white gown and matching feathered headdress, and parts of the throne. "Get out!" The Gungan's ears drooped.

"But yousa flowers â€" "
> "You're fired!" SabÃ© yelled. She jumped to her feet and pointed at the door. "OUT!"<o:p><o:p>

"Yousa Naboo tink yousa so bombad," he said sulkily as two footmen escorted him from the throne room.

Palpatine went to SabÃ©, who was futilely trying to rub the green paint from her arms. He took out a handkerchief, grasped her chin and began wiping green paint from her face. As her face was coated with make-up, the paint came off easily.

"Green isn't your color, my dear," he said quietly, smiling. She gave him a sour look.

"This is one of the few times I've actually been glad of this make-up!" she said.

"I guess I'd better get on the voicephone and start calling florists," PadmÃ© sighed.

"I'll do it," Anakin said suddenly. "You guys have been working on this for months. Let me do something for a change." He smiled. "We'll have green roses at our wedding if I have to Mind Trick every florist on Naboo to get them!"

The night before The Big Dayâ€|

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"I have a bad feeling about this," Anakin told Obi-Wan. They were sitting in Palpatine's living room, waiting for the evening's festivities to begin.

"Just relax. How bad could it be?" Obi-Wan replied.

"How bad could it be? You forget what we're talking about here - a stag party thrown by Palpatine, annual winner of the Most Boring Man In The Universe Award. Ask me again how bad it could be." Obi-Wan

shrugged.

"You forget, he's the most powerful person on this planet after the Queen. Who knows what illicit pleasures the evening may hold?" Obi-Wan wagged his eyebrows suggestively. Anakin snorted.

"Oh please, you're not talking about the most worldly guy around, Obi-Wan. Remember that time those kids at Liam's Lounge gave him a 'health food brownie' that was 'fortified with vitamins T, H, and C'?" Obi-Wan smirked at the memory.

"Ate the whole thing, didn't he?" Obi-Wan recalled. Now Anakin was laughing.

"Remember how he couldn't stop laughing and PadmÃ© got really pissed?" Anakin asked.

"She thought he was laughing at her hairstyle." Obi-Wan replied.

"He was. He said it looked like she had a couple of cinnamon buns stuck to the sides of her head. Then he got the munchies and tried to take a bite!" They howled with laughter at the memory. "I bet she never wears THAT hairstyle again!"

"The best part is, he STILL hasn't figured out what happened," Obi-Wan said. Both Jedi were in hysterics.

"What's so funny?" Palpatine asked as he walked into the living room.

"Nothing," they replied in unison. Two servants entered, carrying a heavy keg of beer between them. Palpatine helped them set it up in the corner. Another servant began laying food out on a table that was pushed against one wall. The doorbell rang.

"Probably Sio Bibble," Anakin whispered. "And he brought his Scrabble set." Obi-Wan snickered. A servant appeared, escorting Captain Panaka and Sio Bibble.

"Told you," Anakin said.

"But no Scrabble set in sight," Obi-Wan murmured.

"The night is still young," Anakin reminded him. The bell rang again. This time, Palpatine left to answer it himself. Panaka walked over to the table stacked with empty glasses and poured a generous helping of fine reddish powder into several of them.

"Is that what I think it is?" Obi-Wan asked, grinning.

"What do you think it is?" Panaka asked innocently.

"Well, I THINK it's spice," Obi-Wan replied.

"Lice?" Sio Bibble asked loudly. "Who has lice?" They ignored him.

"But spice is ILLEGAL!" Anakin said in mock horror.

"Oh no, IS IT?" Panaka asked, matching Anakin's tone. They all

grinned as Panaka filled the spice-laden glasses with Guinness from the keg. Palpatine walked in with the newest arrival.

"Curious am I," Yoda said as he stumped over to the two Jedi. "Heard of a 'stag party' I never have."

"I still want to know who has lice," Sio Bibble piped up insistently.

"No one," Anakin replied.

"No fun? How can you say that? The party hasn't even started yet!"

"No, NO ONE HAS LICE!" Anakin yelled.

"Ice?" Bibble replied. "Try over there by the beer." Anakin rolled his eyes.

"Have a beer," Panaka was walking around with a tray of spicy beers.

"I would LOVE a beer," Anakin said, taking one.

"Me too," Obi-Wan said.

"Make sure my boy Bibble over there gets one," Anakin instructed Panaka.

"My pleasure," he replied, grinning. "Here ya go, governor," he said, handing a beer to Bibble.

"Thank you!"

"Beer, Chancellor?" Panaka offered. "I prepared this one especially for you."

"Why thank you, Captain."

"A beer I think I will have," Yoda said to the Jedi. Panaka heard him and happily obliged.

"Uh oh," Anakin said as Yoda took a long drink. Obi-Wan grinned.

"I thought you were worried about being bored, Anakin!"

Several hours and many spicy beers later, the tone of the stag party had changed considerably. The celebrants were crowded around Palpatine as he sat at his computer, trying to log onto Coruscant Online. Finally, the connection was established.

"You've got mail!" a gratingly happy voice exclaimed brightly.

"I look pale?" Bibble asked. "Who said that?" Everyone ignored him.

"Here's the address," Panaka said, pulling a crumpled piece of paper from his pocket. Palpatine glanced at it and began typing. He pressed "enter" and immediately his connection to the network was lost.

"Damn," he said. "This always happens." He instructed the computer to try connecting again. After several false starts, the computer finally made the connection.

"You've got mail!" it informed him happily.

"Oh be quiet," Palpatine said irritably as he re-typed the address. He hit "enter" again and this time, the site began loading.

"All right!" Panaka exclaimed as a picture began loading, beginning with a woman's face.

"Hotcha!" Anakin said, as her bare upper shoulders loaded.

"Mmmmm!" Yoda said, eyes widening and ears perking up as her bare upper chest loaded.

Obi-Wan leaned forward in anticipation as Coruscant Online booted Palpatine off the network and his computer completely froze up.

"Damn!" Palpatine said again.

"Why are you using COL anyway?" Anakin asked. "Everyone knows they're the lamest service around."

"Yes, but they sent me this free disk." Panaka rolled his eyes.

"They send those to everyone." he told Palpatine, who looked disappointed.

"Oh do they?" His shoulders slumped. "Hmph." He manually rebooted his computer, which emitted a soft musical chord.

"Welcome to Mac OS" the screen proclaimed.

"You know," Palpatine mused, "Since I've gotten this new computer, the only thing that makes it crash like that is COL."

"See? I told you it's crap," Anakin said. "Why do you think they give those disks away for free?" Finally the computer was ready for another try.

"You've got mail!" it said cheerfully. Palpatine glared at it and typed in the address. He hit "return" and the page began to load again. This time it loaded the whole picture. The men leaned forward, staring.

"Wow," Anakin said. Obi-Wan let out a long, low whistle.

"What are we looking at?" Sio Bibble asked, squinting at the screen.

"Real do you think those are, hmmm?" Yoda mused.

"Not a chance," Panaka told him.

"Hey Palpatine," Obi-Wan said. "Reel in your tongue before you get

drool all over your keyboard."

"That Mon Mothma is one hot chick," Anakin observed. "No wonder she's the top supermodel in the Galaxy." They all nodded.

"How old is she, like nineteen or something?" Obi-Wan asked. "This is SO illegal!"

"No, it's only illegal if they're under eighteen." Anakin replied.

"How pathetic is this?" Panaka suddenly demanded. "A bunch of horny guys staring at a picture of a naked woman pulled off of COL? Are we all so lame that we can't get real women?" He glanced at Anakin. "The groom-to-be excluded, of course. But the rest of us are definitely lame." The doorbell rang.

"Something funny about this beer there is," Yoda observed, draining his glass. The Jedi Master's eyes were a bit unfocused, and his ears were drooping.

"That's 'cause you're drinking on an empty stomach," Panaka told him. He began passing around a tray of small cakes. "Try one of these." Anakin took one and sniffed it cautiously. It smelledâ€¦_spicy. Aware that cooked spice was more powerful than the raw powder Panaka had put in their beer, he grinned and popped it in his mouth. Yoda chewed his cake and frowned thoughtfully. Obi-Wan happily bit into a spice cake, savoring the flavor and eagerly anticipating the effects of the drug. Out past his bedtime and unused to consuming beer spiked with spice, Sio Bibble had passed out in his chair. Palpatine proved to be as naïve in the matter of spice cakes as he had been concerning "fortified" brownies. He consumed several spice cakes in short order. A servant appeared, escorting the new arrival. She was dark-haired, green-eyed, beautiful, heavily made up, and scantily attired. _

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"Hi," she said. She walked over to the stereo and put on some music. "Where's the condemned man?" Everyone pointed at Anakin. Smiling seductively, she sexed her way over to him and began dancing. Soon, she was unbuttoning her tiny, transparent blouse.

"She's a stripper!" Palpatine said suddenly. Anakin shook his head.

"You're sharp as a tack, Palpatine," he said. "Can't put a damn thing past you, can we?"

"But I didn't hire a stripper!" Palpatine protested.

"No," Obi-Wan said, grinning. "I did."

The morning of his wedding day, Anakin woke in a panic. Something was smothering him. Something soft. Frantically, he clawed at his face. He sat up. He was on the sofa in Palpatine's living room. In his hands, he held the tiny scrap of transparent fabric that had served the stripper as a blouse. He looked around. Sio Bibble was still passed out in his chair.

Anakin stood up and walked around.

"Hello?" he called. "Anyone here?"

"Here am I," Yoda mumbled, stumbling down the hall and clutching his head in misery. The stripper followed closely behind, wearing only part of her costume from the previous night.

"Thanks," she said, taking her blouse from Anakin's hands.

"Sure, no problem," he mumbled, embarrassed.

"Your friend here may be small, but the Force sure is with him," she exclaimed. Anakin's eyes widened.

"You slept with a stripper?" Anakin asked Yoda, incredulous. Yoda shrugged.

"Much beer did I have. Many cakes with funny taste I did eat. Good idea at the time, it seemed like." A door opened, and a horrified Captain Panaka pushed past them and ran up the hall. They heard the front door open and shut.

"What's up with him?" Anakin asked. The other two shrugged. A half-dressed Obi-Wan appeared in the doorway of the room from which Panaka had fled.

"That's odd," Obi-Wan said, puzzled. "He seemed awfully keen last night."

"I do NOT want to know," Anakin told him. Obi-Wan shrugged.

"Looks like the condemned man is the only one who didn't get any action on his last night of freedom," the stripper observed.

"Nah, Palpatine didn't get any either," Anakin said. Obi-Wan walked down the hall and peered into the master bedroom.

"Strange."

"What is?" Anakin asked, following.

"His bed hasn't been slept in," Obi-Wan told them.

"That is weird," Anakin replied. "I wonder where he is."

EirtaÃ© hurried through the hallway, tapping on doors to wake the rest of the handmaidens. When she reached SabÃ©'s door, she encountered someone leaving. As he shut the door and turned to walk up the hallway, EirtaÃ© recognized him.

"Good morning, Chancellor," she said, giving him a respectful bow.

"Yes, good morning," he murmured, anxious to make a hasty, inconspicuous departure. EirtaÃ© suddenly grabbed his elbow and dragged him back into SabÃ©'s room.

"What â€" ?" he asked. SabÃ© looked up as they entered. She was dressed in a long silk robe in preparation for her morning

bath.

"Please forgive me," EirtaÃ© murmured. "But I could not allow the Chancellor to leave the Palace as he is. There would be talk." SabÃ© looked at him, and immediately bit back the scolding she had been prepared to give the young handmaiden.

"Thank you, EirtaÃ©. I should have noticed that myself. You have done well." Palpatine looked puzzled. SabÃ© smiled. "Look in the mirror, Palpatine." He did so, and his eyes widened. His cheeks were covered with a fine patina of white make-up, and his lips were stained quite red. He rubbed at his lips, but to no avail. SabÃ© laughed. "EirtaÃ©, please help the Chancellor remove his make-up and see to it that he is able to leave the Palace unnoticed. I must make myself seemly to attend the Queen."

"Yes, SabÃ©." As the handmaiden began working, SabÃ© caught a glimpse of her own reflection and groaned, remembering the low-cut dress she was supposed to wear that day. On her neck and upper chest were a number of red marks. "Of all days," she muttered, touching them lightly with her fingers. She met Palpatine's eyes in the mirror, and he blushed. Laughing, she went to her closet and began looking for a scarf that would match her dress.

The Ceremonyâ€|

"I now pronounce you husband and wife," the justice of the peace said, and the crowd broke into cheers as Anakin lifted PadmÃ©'s golden veil and kissed her. They smiled at each other in relief. They turned to face the cheering crowd. At last it was over.

"All that planning and worrying, and the whole thing took less than twenty minutes," Anakin mumbled as he walked PadmÃ© back up the isle, followed by their attendants. She shrugged.

"That is the nature of weddings, Anakin."

"Man, what a pain in the butt," he complained.

"It is not an experience I plan to repeat," she agreed. He raised his eyebrows.

"I didn't think it was!" She laughed.

PadmÃ© and Anakin stood in the receiving line, flanked by SabÃ© and Palpatine on PadmÃ©'s left and Shmi, Watto, and Obi-Wan on Anakin's right.

"How do you remember who all these people are?" Anakin asked PadmÃ© quietly. She shrugged.

"Actually, I don't have a clue who half of these people are. I invited them because Palpatine said we had to."

"Unbelievable," Anakin muttered. "You mean we spent hundreds of thousands of credits to have a twenty minute ceremony so we could invite people we don't even know?" She nodded.

"Yes, I'm afraid so." He shook his head.

"And the catering! How much did we spend on that?" She shrugged. "And those damn green flowers! They cost a fortune!" She sighed.

"Welcome to the world of royalty, Anakin."

The line of well-wishers seemed endless, and Anakin was quickly learning that there were only so many variations on "Thank you so much for coming". Suddenly, he smiled as he saw a young Rodian making his way towards them.

"Whazzup!" Anakin said, giving the Rodian a high five. The Rodian looked them over and frowned.

"All those times I waited on you guys at McDiarmids, I had no idea who you were," the Rodian said. He shook his head. "I can't believe you invited me to your wedding."

"Go ahead, say it." Anakin prompted, grinning.

"You guys are weird," the Rodian said.

FINIS.

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